

# Federal Defenders OF NEW YORK, INC.

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April 13, 2015

**By ECF and Hand**  
**TO BE FILED UNDER SEAL**

Honorable John Gleeson  
United States District Judge  
Eastern District of New York  
225 Cadman Plaza East  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

**Re: United States v. Sulejmah Hadzovic**  
**09 CR 648 (JG)**

Dear Judge Gleeson:

I write on behalf of my client, Sulejmah Hadzovic, who is scheduled to be sentenced on April 15, 2015. Over the past six years Mr. Hadzovic has made an extraordinary transformation from disaffected youngster who sought to wage violent jihad, to studious, peaceful man who values family above all. Remarkably, this transformation was in motion before Mr. Hadzovic was ever confronted by federal law enforcement agents. Every action Mr. Hadzovic has taken since he renounced this conspiracy demonstrates the righteousness of his character. The unique circumstances here present a very strong case for the full extent of the Court's leniency and we request a sentence of time served. In support of this application we attach letters from: Adem and Mivadete Hadzovic (Ex. A); Eralda Hadzovic (Ex. B); Eldon Hadzovic (Ex. C); and Merlina Hadzovic (D). We also attach a copy of Mr. Hadzovic's Associate's Degree (Ex. E) and Dean's List acknowledgment (Ex. F).

## **I. Background**

The story of how Mr. Hadzovic ended up in Cairo seeking to wage jihad is not unusual. He was 19 years old,<sup>1</sup> he hadn't done very well in school, he was arguing with his parents, he became drawn to fundamentalist Islam. He watched some YouTube videos and his heart and

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<sup>1</sup>As the Supreme Court recognized in Miller v. Alabama, 132 S. Ct. 2455 (2012), new developments in neuroscience demonstrate that the teenage brain is not fully formed. Teenagers are therefore less culpable for their criminal actions than adults *and* more susceptible to rehabilitation.

mind were infiltrated by a talented network of jihadist recruiters. But just months after he arrived in the Middle East, he knew that he was wrong. He knew that he had no business seeking to join a violent group. He sought guidance from non-jihadist religious scholars and he stopped believing the propaganda that had brought him to Cairo. He withdrew from the conspiracy and went home to his family. When the United States government came knocking at his door, he answered, and immediately did everything in his power to mitigate the effects of his crime. As the government acknowledges, there is a real possibility that his cooperation saved lives. See Gov't ltr at p. 1 ("[Mr. Hadzovic's assistance] significantly contributed to the disruption of a terrorist attack."). His deep remorse and sense of obligation to right his wrongs has been palpable from the first moment he was approached by the government. Mr. Hadzovic's cooperation was, indeed, "extraordinary." See Gov't ltr at 1. His extraordinary cooperation sheds tremendous light on the sincerity of his remorse and provides great comfort that this young man will never again commit any sort of crime.

Just as extraordinary as his cooperation is his complete and self-directed rehabilitation while on pretrial release. Mr. Hadzovic was subject to house arrest for two years. After the conviction of Betim Kaziu, his pre-trial restrictions were gradually relaxed and in recent years he has had minimal restrictions placed on his freedom. He has taken excellent advantage of the time he has been in the community and has not made a single misstep during the six years he has been supervised.

Mr. Hadzovic returned to Laguardia Community College, where he was on the Dean's List and earned an Associates Degree in Business Administration in 2012. See Ex's E & F. Immediately after completing community college, he entered Queens College in the Fall of 2013, to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Economics. Tragically, on March 9, 2014, the second youngest of his four siblings, Amal, died at age 23. Amal was in perfectly good health, went to take out the garbage, and dropped dead. He left a young wife behind. An autopsy was unable to reveal a cause of death. Amal's death has had a truly devastating effect on Mr. Hadzovic's close-knit family. His mother has been clinically depressed since she lost her son. She had been a lively, animated person, and now she just sits quietly and cries a lot. She has been unable to take care of the household as she used to, and relies heavily on Mr. Hadzovic to run the home. Mr. Hadzovic took some time off from school to grieve and be present for his family. This loss has brought his family even closer together and further reinforced the primacy of family for him. He returned to Queens College as a full-time student for the Spring 2015 semester. He is now on track to graduate with a bachelor's degree in the Spring of 2016, or even as early as Fall of 2015.

For the entirety of his pretrial release, Mr. Hadzovic has worked with his father, who is the super for a 110-unit residential building. Mr. Hadzovic does renovations, demolition, painting, and tiling preparation. Since his father also works nights as a janitor at the Bar Association of New York, Mr. Hadzovic is responsible for any work that must take place in the evenings. He also regularly fills in for the building porter, which requires him to do all the cleaning, maintenance, and garbage collection.

Mr. Hadzovic's career goals have evolved over time. In 2009 he hoped to be an Emergency Medical Technician ("EMT"). After confronting the legitimate fear that he would be barred from EMT work due to his conviction, he redirected his goals. Now majoring in economics, Mr. Hadzovic's dream job is to work on budgeting in state or local government. He again recognizes that he may never be offered a job in government due to this conviction and is pursuing jobs in building management and maintenance as well.<sup>2</sup>

For the past two years, Mr. Hadzovic has been in a relationship with a young woman who works as an office assistant at a school in Brooklyn.<sup>3</sup> The two plan to get married, but Mr. Hadzovic insists on waiting to learn his fate in this case. If he does not go to prison, they will get married in June. They will live in a house in Whitestone, New York, that Mr. Hadzovic's father owns and is currently renovating.

## **II. Reasonable Sentence Under 18 U.S.C. § 3553**

We are asking for a non-incarceratory sentence because we firmly believe that locking Mr. Hadzovic up is not necessary to serve any of the goals of sentencing. Further, we submit that sparing him a prison sentence does not mean that his crime will go unpunished. He has been supervised for nearly six years and his freedom was significantly curtailed for the two years that he was subject to home detention. For six years he has lived with the knowledge that he would one day be sentenced for a crime that carries a maximum term of 15 years. He has lived his life, but with the uneasiness of knowing that he may go to prison. He played an essential role in sending his childhood best friend to prison for 27 years. Though he is confident that it was the right thing to do, it is still a heavy burden that he will carry with him for life. And, perhaps, most significantly, Mr. Hadzovic will never be able to escape the disastrous choices he has made. Any time he applies for a job, his prospective employers will learn that he has a terrorism conviction. Any time someone simply "googles" him, they will learn that he was a "terrorist" who informed against his best friend.

Mr. Hadzovic has amply demonstrated his true character to the Court, his family, and his community. He is peaceful, honest, and he respects authority. Federal prosecutors, law enforcement agents, and Pre-Trial Services Officers have observed him closely for six years. He has not, for a single moment, exhibited behaviors or personality traits that would suggest any future dangerousness or risk of re-offending. At 19, he was searching for his path in life and stumbled upon violent jihad. He has effectively deprogrammed himself through conscientious

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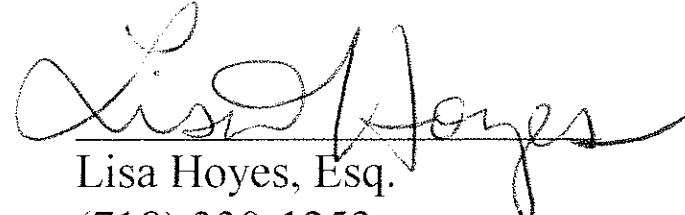
<sup>2</sup>A Certificate of Relief from Civil Disabilities would remove any automatic bars to government employment. A federal judge does not have jurisdiction to issue such a certificate, but I will ask Your Honor to consider recommending to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision that Mr. Hadzovic be granted such relief.

<sup>3</sup>Consistent with their religion, this relationship is not a typical dating relationship, but rather, a focused and chaperoned courtship that is sanctioned by their families.

study, and he has made amends for his actions. He has worked to spread the message he now firmly believes, which is that violent jihad is not consistent with true Islam. It is now clear to him that his path in life is to complete his education, work hard, and have a family.

For all these reasons, we respectfully request that Mr. Hadzovic be sentenced to time served.

Respectfully submitted,



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cc: Seth DuCharme, AUSA  
Shreve Arial, AUSA